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ABSTRACT

To explore the role of one specific revision strategy--reading and rereading pieces of text--in the composing process, case studies were made of two college freshman writers: Jim, who was highly apprehensive about the process of composing, and David, who was not at all apprehensive about writing. Specifically, videotapes of the students' composing aloud processes were examined and transcripts of interviews with the two students were reviewed to see how they used reading as they wrote. Findings revealed that Jim did not use reading to discover and articulate his thoughts. David, on the other hand, interrupted his writing more frequently than did Jim to read what he had written, and also employed a much wider range of reading strategies. Reading seemed to serve David as a multipurpose writing strategy, a catalyst that helped him make decisions about the rhetorical effectiveness of his prose, his audience and their needs, the purpose of his paper, and the grammatical problems he recognized. Jim's and David's reading activities also differed dramatically after they finished their first drafts. David spent more time engaged in rereading portions of his completed first drafts and used rereading as a strategy for "re-seeing" his paper. (HOD)

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Reading as a Writing and Revising Strategy

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Reading as a Writing and Revising Strategy

Several weeks ago when we got together to work this session out, it was 10 degrees below zero in Houghton America. The Siberian jetstream was rattling the windows in their frames, and there was two and a half feet of snow on the ground outside. As we huddled around Bruce's woodstove to keep warm, we talked about revision and we discovered to our delight that the three papers we had conceived separately also fit quite nicely together. After Billie had begun by providing you with a picture of the broad cognitive strategies involved in writing and revision, we decided, my paper might help to show you individual cases of these same patterns. And so for the next few minutes I'd like to describe a small case study I completed to explore the role of one specific revision strategy--that of reading and rereading pieces of text--in the composing processes of two individuals.

Actually, the study was inspired by Donald Murray, our respondant who wrote a paper entitled, "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader." In this article, Murray suggests that reading may be a kind of generative writing strategy. He notes that writers act as their own "first readers," scanning and rescanning their own prose to evaluate the content, form, and language of the material they produce. Now like any other self-conscious writer, I believed Murray when he said that reading and writing were connected at some very basic level in the act of composing; however, I also knew from my own work with highly apprehensive writers that not all of our students are equally successful in using reading as a productive writing strategy.

And so I went back to an earlier study I had done at The University of Texas at Austin to reexamine the videotapes of high and low writing apprehensives composing aloud in response to two typical first-year writing

assignments and review the transcripts of interviews with these individuals to see how they used reading as they wrote. This paper tells the story of the two student writers I chose as case studies for this report: Jim, who was highly apprehensive about the process of composing, and David, who was not at all apprehensive about writing. A careful look at the composing processes of these two students indicated that Jim, the highly apprehensive writer, employed a much more limited range of reading strategies and employed them less productively in his writing and revision than did David, the low writing apprehensive.

Background

Before we begin I'd like to take just a minute to show you how writing apprehension relates to the students about whom we are going to be talking. We've all identified these individuals in our classes, so I'm sure you'll recognize my portrait of Jim. Like the other individuals identified as highly apprehensive about writing in my original study, Jim exhibited a generalized dislike of academic writing and the reading activities that he saw as part of such writing. As he noted to the investigator in an early interview:

> I don't like to write. Hardly at all I don't like to write.... I really don't think I ever have as far as I can remember...I don't like to read; I think that's probably part of it. Probably part of it is that I'm hyper-active, I guess....So, if I'm going to sit down and be still or something... I'd rather go to sleep than to sit still and write or read or something like that.

Jim avoided writing in an academic setting by choosing those classes that required minimal or no writing and by establishing elaborate rituals of

procrastination that allowed him to put off writing as long as possible. He also avoided writing outside of school.

Like his fellow apprehensives, Jim traced his current apprehension to two sources, limited writing instruction in grade school and high school and negative evaluations of his papers by past teachers. In interviews, Jim reported doing very little writing in grade school and saw his high school writing instruction as less than complete:

> I. Did you write a lot in high school?
>
> J. I took one course in paragraph writing. I took a paragraph writing course and an essay writing course. And I think that was about all the real writing I did....I can never remember having to write a two or three page paper in high school.
>
> I. What did you learn in your essay class?
>
> J. I don't remember...I must not listen....I didn't like that class at all; matter of fact I hated that class....I don't think I got a whole lot out of it. See, I don't ever remember her telling us...I mean, anything about how to write. She didn't hardly ever write anything up on the board telling us stuff, not that I remember. I know I didn't take notes on anything....I don't really think I know how [to write]. That's because I write like I talk. That's the only thing I know how to do. I don't ever remember being taught how to write, really.

In Jim's opinion, his lack of writing instruction in grade school and secondary school contributed to the negative evaluations he received on his papers from his college teachers. Because he had not mastered a number of writing skills that he knew to be important in producing successful academic

prose, Jim expected to fail on the written assignments he handed into college teachers. Unfortunately, because he avoided situations in which he could practice writing and instead rushed pell-mell through those writing assignments he was forced to undertake, his expectations of low evaluations were often fulfilled.

In contrast, David, one of the low writing apprehensives in the original study, enjoyed writing. He was attracted by the creativity and competence it allowed him, and although he agreed that composing could be "a chore," he liked the feeling of dealing successfully with the very complex range of constraints a writing task usually involved. David, unlike Jim, was quite willing to involve himself in challenging writing situations both in and out of school. In school, he enjoyed his English classes and did not feel compelled to avoid courses in other disciplines that had heavy writing components. Like the other low writing apprehensives, David also reported doing a great deal of writing on his own time--keeping a journal, composing poetry, and maintaining a regular correspondance with friends and family.

In further contrast to Jim, David felt that his writing instruction in the past had been adequate and comprehensive, although he did mention that some of his teachers had concentrated too heavily on "spelling mistakes and grammatical errors." He reported doing explications, analysis papers, essay questions, research papers, persuasive papers, newspaper stories, yearbook articles, and poetry in high school and writing in a number of non-English classes:

> I had classes to write in...like my Shakespeare class...I think I had to write papers in about half of my classes, but not just English classes, in other classes too.

As a result of this past experience, David felt quite confident when undertaking most writing assignments:

> Well, I mean I'm no great writer or anything, but I do think of myself as a good writer. I mean I see the papers that some of the kids in my dorm hand in. At least I know what I want to say and how to organize it....spelling and stuff like that has never been hard for me....I guess I'm an 'A' or 'B' student in English.

Because of their differing backgrounds, skill levels, and experiences, Jim and David approached writing tasks in two distinct ways. Jim's primary concern was with "getting it over with." Writing was so painful to him that he galloped through the composing process at breakneck pace, taking time for little or no planning and only minor revisions. From previous experience, Jim knew that his headlong rush through the writing process would ensure him a quick, if not high quality, draft of his composition. Because of his apprehension, he found this method acceptable and even desirable; he was concerned less with <u>what</u> he had to say than with the fact that he was finishing "as soon as possible." He explained,

> It's not that I don't care: I care about the grade and stuff, but it's really that I don't like to do it [writing] at all....I like to get it over with. Well, I can't say that because I put it off. Once I start I like to finish it, you know. I don't like to drag it out for...hours and stuff like that. Yes, I know the right way you have to take time. It's almost impossible not to. That's probably why I'll never be a good writer.

Jim also felt that he had a limited repertoire of writing skills to apply to the assignments he was given in the experiment and was not at all confident that he could produce successful papers.

David, on the other hand, approached assignments determinedly, if not eagerly, with a strong sense of confidence in his ability to handle successfully all those activities he suspected would be involved. David took more time to consider the assignment and his approach to it before he began to write and spent more time brainstorming and listing ideas, focusing his topic, and outlining his essay before he began drafting than did Jim. After completing an initial draft, David, unlike Jim, made major revisions in the text he had created.

Using Reading as a Writing and Revising Strategy

The differing backgrounds, attitudes, experiences, and skills with which Jim and David approached writing tasks predicted how effective they were in using reading as a productive writing and revising strategy. Specifically, the subjects differed in two ways:

1. First, as they drafted and redrafted their papers, Jim and David differed in the reading strategies they brought to bear on the composing task.

2. Second, as they finished the first drafts of their papers Jim and David differed in their willingness to use reading as a strategy for "re-seeing" their paper and identifying areas that needed major revision.

Drafting and Redrafting: Accessibility of Reading Strategies

Now I like to discuss each of these points in turn, starting with the different ways in which Jim and David used reading as a strategy in writing and rewriting their first drafts. The first thing I noticed as I reviewed the composing-aloud sessions of these individuals was that although both interrupted their writing fairly frequently to read short portions of their text, they engaged in subtly different patterns of reading activities and accessed different kinds of reading strategies. In Table I, for example, it becomes evident that Jim and David did not spend an equal amount of their drafting time engaged in the three major reading activities that I coded: reading a word or several words (Ra), reading a sentence or several sentences (Rb), or reading a larger portion of text (Rc).

Insert Table I about here.

David, for example, spent twice and, sometimes, three times as much time engaged in of these activities on the two assignments.

Even more indicative than the amount of time devoted to scanning passages of various lengths, however, were the students' strategies for reading. Jim's primary motivation, for example, was to rush through the two short first drafts of his assignments, to "get it over with" in his words. The comments Jim made during his composing-aloud sessions and later interviews indicated that he did not use reading to discover and articulate his thoughts, to see how well the text that he had written conformed to the meaning he wanted to communicate, to evaluate the form and structure of his prose, or to assess the

need for large-scale revision efforts. Although Jim did interrupt his writing 39 times to reread one or several words (Ra) that he had written and 21 times to reread a sentence or two (Rb), he used 97% of these episodes for two purposes: first, to retrieve specific words or phrases from his long term memory, and second, to confirm suspected surface-level errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Examine, for instance, the following representative example from the protocol of his second draft:

> 1:47.23 (Jim writes his first sentence.) I come before you today to point out an unfair rule that was... (stops writing, taps head with pencil, traces spiral binding of notebook on desk) "that was, uh..., is that instituted or instigated? Well, let's say (begins writing again) instigated... "I think that's it." (continues writing) last year. "Wait, ins-teh-gated, I think. Better look that up..." (looks in dictionary, corrects spelling, and continues with the next sentence).

In interpreting this data, we can venture two guesses about why Jim used a minimal number of reading strategies. The first explanation has to do with his attitude toward writing and reading. Like the other high writing apprehensives in the study, Jim habitually latched onto the first narrative topic he could come up with early in his composing process and refused to deviate from it in later stages. As a highly apprehensive writer, Jim saw this strategy as a welcome express train through the maze of the composing process. Because of this strategy, he was not about to spend the time necessary to discover new directions, try alternative methods of presenting the material more effectively, to take risks in written expression. Such reading and

writing activities would only slow his passage through the writing effort. Second, we might guess that, because he practiced reading for such limited purposes (i.e., retrieving a word, a thought, or a phrase; correcting spelling, punctuation, usage), he never took advantage of chances to develop more sophisticated reading strategies (i.e., comparing intended meaning with actual text, exploring the effectiveness of material with a specific audience in mind, discovering new directions, determining if the text's form followed its function, and assessing the need for or the effectiveness of larger revision efforts). Jim, therefore, was faced with a double dilemma. He did not use more sophisticated reading strategies (either he could not use them because he was unfamiliar with them, or he would not use them because they required he spend more time engaged in the composing process) and, because he did not practice these strategies, he never learned to master them.

David, on the other hand, interrupted his writing more frequently than did Jim to read what he had written, and also employed a much wider range of reading strategies. A closer look at one particular cluster of reading activity--occurring as David composed the first draft of Assignment 1--can illustrate some of different strategies for which he employed these short re-readings.

4:35.00 (David begins writing the sixth sentence of his first draft) Most of you probably aren't sure... (stops writing, taps pen on desk) "aren't sure...?" (repeats and goes back to read the beginning of the sentence and get a running jump) "Most of you probably aren't sure what to expect from college..." (stops and asks question to himself) "Is there

a comma there?" (rereads sentence once again and hesitently adds comma) "Most of you probably aren't sure what to expect from college,..." (continues to compose) but suspect that it is different from high school. When I graduated from Austin Austin High School... (pauses briefly) I didn't know the answer either. I still don't. (Here David stops, suspecting that he has diverged from his original plan and the intent of the assignment--to offer useful advice based on his experience as a successful college freshman.)

4:35.55 "Hmm, doesn't sound like I can give them much help...I could write another paper, 'How I Blew Off My Freshman Year'" (begins to read first sentence again) "Most of you probably aren't sure..." (David's reading alerts him to the fact that he has repeated 'probably' twice in two sentences, and he omits the first occurrence. He then goes back to the first sentence to read again.) "Most of you aren't sure... (he comments on the deletion he has just made and continues reading) better... what to expect from college, but probably suspect that it is different from high school. When I graduated from Austin High School I didn't know the answer either. I still don't..." (stops to evaluate and comment) "Hmm! I'm thinking now that these are seventeen year olds and that they're not interested in me. They want to hear about themselves and what they're worried about." (He then deletes part of his first sentence and all of his second and third sentences. He reads what is left) "Most of

you aren't sure what to expect from college,..." (David substitutes a sentence that addresses the students' concerns more directly) you know it will be different but you aren't certain what these changes will be.

4:37.12 (At this point David seems satisfied with the passage, but scans it one last time to make sure. He spots his comma splice and stops to reread.) "from college... probably need a...uh...a...semi-comma [sic] there (changes comma to semi-colon and continues to read)... from college; you know it will... (stops to comment)...that ought to get it."

As we can see, reading seemed to serve David as a multi-purpose writing strategy, a catalyst that helped him make decisions about the rhetorical effectiveness of his prose ("Hmm, that doesn't sound like I can give them much help..."), his audience and their needs ("...these are seventeen-year-olds and...they're not interested in me..."), the purpose of his paper (as when he deleted the sentences "I didn't know the answer either. I still don't." because he wanted to assume the posture of an expert), his stylistic concerns (as he deleted the careless repetition of "probably"), and the grammatical problems he recognized ("probably need a...semi-comma [sic] there"). In addition, David seemed to be conscious of the importance of reading to his writing process. As he noted in response to a question about why he went back and read the preceding words or sentences several times.

David: I just sort of go back to see what I've just said. And maybe, you know, that generates more material for me when I do that.

Post-Drafting: Willingness to Revise

Jim's and David's reading activities also differed dramatically after they finished their first drafts. While both Jim and David took time to reread large portions of their initial drafts after they had finished composing, each used this kind of reading activity as a means toward a different end.

Jim ended each of the first drafts he composed during the experiment with a sigh of relief and a disparaging comment about his own efforts. Without wasting much time, he then proceeded to reread the draft he had composed, in its entirety, one time. Although Jim claimed in an early interview that this activity led to a "revision" of his papers, he later admitted that it was an automatic and, often, empty gesture. Such reading, Jim realized, did not lead to "re-vision" of content, organization, or presentation, but to a minimal correction of grammatical and spelling errors:

> At that point [when he reads his first draft], I'm not looking to make big changes because if I go back and do that I'll start changing it [the paper]. And then I'll think, "Which one is better--the first time I wrote it or the second time?" Then I'd have to do it all over again, so I'd never get finished! So I figure the first time I get it down, I'm just going to leave it like that. You know I'll correct the glaring misplaced words or some spelling, or something like that, but I'm not going to change the whole paper. I really just read and hope I don't see anything so bad that I have to write some more.

On the first assignment Jim wrote during the study, he made 6 changes in punctuation or mechanics, and 4 changes in spelling when he went back to

reread his draft for a final time. He also added, deleted, or substituted 4 words and three phrases or clauses. On the second assignment, Jim made no changes at all.

The data gathered in these case studies suggests two reasons for the distinctive reading pattern that Jim exhibited in the post-drafting movement of his writing process. First, of course, is his desire as a highly apprehensive writer to finish the piece as quickly as possible. As a result of his anxiety, Jim was unwilling to dwell on the writing task, to linger over his prose as he searched carefully for areas that needed improvement. If Jim had truly read to "re-see" his work, to honestly criticize the meaning he had articulated, to adjust this meaning, or discover new meaning, he felt he would be letting himself in for more punishment, more writing in the form of major changes. Perhaps even more than this general unwillingness to subject himself to the task of writing, however, Jim's lack of reading and writing skills may have kept him from revising his writing. He may have realized, quite realistically in this case, that he had limited revising, proofreading, and editing strategies to bring to bear on the problem areas he might identify as he read. As Jim said,

> I'm not sure I know <u>how</u> to revise my papers if you know what I mean. That's probably one of my big problems isn't it? I mean sometimes they [papers] don't sound just right, but then I'm not sure what to do about it. When you've gotten that far you're sunk, you know?

David's reading activities during the postdrafting period stood in contrast to Jim's. David spent more time engaged in rereading portions of his completed first drafts, and, more importantly, he used rereading as a strategy

for "re-seeing" his paper:

I: Why do you read your first draft after you've finished it? What are you looking for?

D: Well, I read it to see if it works. You know, I would make a major change if something doesn't work out, if it wasn't coming across just right, I have to deal with it....I usually mark out whole sentences and sometimes paragraphs and rewrite them over.

I: But what exactly do you look for? What, for instance, would make you stop and change something?

D: Well, first, you know, I guess I'm looking for if it works with the audience. In the second one [assignment] like I said before I imagined myself talking to a bunch of really excited booster-type people in high school....And then I look for if it [the paper] does what I want it to.... It's just kind of hunch that I have that it's not right...or not what I wanted to say or should say according to the assignment....Sometimes I just sit back and look at all the ideas I want to stress and all the ideas I have put down. And I always look for spelling and repetition...like it [the paper] has seven "is's" in four sentences or something like that, or the same sentence structure or else it will be really boring. If those things happen I have to make a major change.

David's activities bear out his explanation of his rereading strategies. On the first assignment he wrote, for example, David rewrote a total of 12 sentences because he didn't think their content or form was appropriate for his audience and 7 sentences because they didn't match his intended meaning.

He also deleted 2 sentences because they "didn't fit" in his essay and added 3 more in various locations. Moreover, David added, deleted, and substituted 23 different words or phrases and corrected 4 marks of punctuation and 5 misspellings as a direct result of his rereading.

Conclusions

As I noted earlier, this paper presents a case study of two subjects, engaged in composing aloud for two typical freshman writing assignments. I will not attempt, therefore, to generalize too broadly from the findings I have reported here. I can, however, offer three tentative conclusions from the current study that will provide fruitful areas of study for future investigators:

1. Not all students use reading in the same way as they compose. Individuals develop their own repertoires of reading strategies for use in writing tasks. Some individuals develop more sucessful repertoires than others.

2. Writers who are highly apprehensive about composing may have mastered fewer effective reading strategies to apply in the drafting and postdrafting stages of a writing task than have low apprehensives.

3. Subjects who are highly apprehensive about writing may be less willing to spend the time necessary for a critical reading of their own text during the composing process than are their less apprehensive counterparts. Rushing through the composing process

may be a strategy that highly apprehensive writers learn in order to deal with the painful effort of writing.

These limited findings make it obvious that much remains to be done before we can confidently apply our research to pedagogical situations. We must begin to conduct further research on those questions that are derived from such early studies as this one. We do not yet know, for example, whether there exists a comparable construct to writing apprehension that involves reading. If we find that "reading apprehension" does exist, we have to determine its exact relationship to writing apprehension. Does past instruction engender reading anxiety? If so, how does it do so and to what extent?

If we are successful in isolating the causes or the sources of reading apprehension in the composing process, we must also search for effective ways of dealing with it. In the face of extreme apprehension, we may be able to teach certain writers, through some sort of systematic instruction, to employ a wider range of reading strategies or to access more efficiently those strategies they have already mastered. It is possible that this instruction could take the form of psychological techniques that help subjects control their fear of writing and/or reading.

With answers to these questions and others like them, we can begin to refine what we know about the connections between reading and writing. If the findings from this investigation are any indication, we may discover that our notion of reading and writing as two separate activities needs fundamental revision. Such a concept would have serious pedagogical and theoretical repercussions in all areas of English studies. It suggests, for example, that

we, as a profession, may have created a false dichotomy between courses in composition and courses that involve the teaching of critical or close reading. We might discover, as some researchers have already begun to suggest, that reading drafts at various stages, using a range of different strategies, may be one of the essential processes involved in writing a successful composition (Flynn, 1982). Petersen and Burkland have already maintained, for instance, that the strategies they ask their students to employ when reading literature in their composition courses are critical in helping them become better writers (Petersen & Burkland, 1982). If other studies document the same close connections between reading and writing suggested by this and other investigations (Petersen & Friesinger, 1981; Grimm & Burkland, 1983), we must realize that teaching students to become better writers may necessitate teaching them to become better readers.

Endnotes

1. Assignment 1 asked students to write a speech for an audience of seniors from their old high school in which they revealed the one piece of advice they wish they had been given before going off to college. The writers were asked to use an illustrative narrative from their own experience to persuade the audience to accept and profit from the advice. Assignment 2 asked subjects to write a speech for a policy-making board at the high scool they had attended before coming to college. In the speech, the subjects were asked to tell of one practice at the school that was outmoded or unfair and to use an illustrative narrative from their own high-school experience to persuade the board to change this practice.

2. For more detailed information on the methodolgy employed during this 1980 study, see Cynthia L. Selfe, "The Composing Processes of Four High and Four Low Writing Apprehensives: A Modified Case Study," Diss. The University of Texas-Austin 1981.

3. For more detailed results about the findings of this 1980 study, see Cynthia L. Selfe, "The Predrafting Processes of Four High and Four Low W iting Apprehensives," Research in the Teaching of Writing, to be published February, 1984. Also see "An Apprehensive Writer Composes," in Writing Blocks, ed. Mike Rose, to be published with Guilford Press, 1984.

4. Throughout this paper, material that subjects wrote as they composed aloud is underlined. Material that is both underlined and contained in quotes indicates that subjects are reading aloud what they have already written.

Material that is contained in quotes and not underlined represents subjects' oral comments. Time is reported in hours, minutes, and seconds. Thus, material that is marked 1:47.23 represents activities that went on 1 hour, 47 minutes, and 23 seconds into a particular composing-aloud session.

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